

## 4 Reasons Why Athletes Need Tai Chi



We know practicing tai chi or qigong helps the elderly keep their balance and individuals recover from congestive heart problems. We don't often think of yoga and tai chi as helping athletes improve their game.

If you're an athlete, your goal is to increase your speed, power and endurance, and stay injury-free. Long distance runs, practice games and strength workouts are typical. Practicing tai chi with its slower, more mindful moves seems counter-intuitive but it can add another dimension to your training.

Athletes such as golfer Tiger Woods and Olympic gold medal winner skier Ted Ligety have used qigong and tai chi to benefit their games. Think about it. Tai chi's emphasis on fluidly turning from the hips and waist improves power, balance, and smoothness of motion. Learning to harness one's chi and send it in the direction you want it to go can be translated into the same force used to drive a baseball out of the park.

*Here's how tai chi can help an athlete up his or her game:*

**Breathing.** Deep breathing creates calm before a competition. A relaxed state of mind helps the athlete become focused and able to stay in the moment. Less tension in the body means more powerful, better-executed movements. Efficient breathing techniques allow the body to use oxygen proficiently.

**Movements.** A pitcher on the mound stands on one leg before sending the ball to the batter. A tennis player is bounding around the court, often from one leg to another and side to side, to meet the ball before hitting it back over the net. Tai chi helps athletes stay quick and light on their feet by increasing their flexibility, balance and agility.

**Neuromuscular pathways.** Do the same movement over and over and it becomes a habit. By moving slowly and repeatedly through complex and dynamic movements our brains are rewired to perform the movements more efficiently. This trains your brain to move your muscles in a more optimal way. When the athlete needs to do the moves quickly during game time, "muscle memory" takes over. Proficiency allows for free flowing energy and performance improves.

**Active Rest.** Rest and recovery days are just as important in an athlete's training program as skills and drills. Active rest helps prevent repetitive stress injuries and brings oxygen and nutrients to muscles damaged by working out. It also helps flush away waste products like lactic acid that can build up in muscles post exercise.

If you're an athlete who wants to improve your abilities or one who seems to be constantly injured, give tai chi a try.